

issues - health

Health

Throughout out her entire career in government, health care has been among Rep. Louise Slaughter's top priorities. Rep. Slaughter is considered one of the top health care authorities in the U.S. Congress, with a range of legislative victories under her belt. As the only Member of Congress holding a master's degree in public health, she is uniquely qualified to examine and discuss the health care issues before our nation.

Rep. Slaughter's record on health care reflects her broad interest and deep commitment in these issues. She is acknowledged as the leading expert in Congress on genetic discrimination issues, having sponsored two bills on this issue and garnered the support of a majority of Congress for banning this practice. During the early 1990s, she was responsible for securing the first \$500 million dedicated by Congress to breast cancer research at the National Institutes of Health (NIH). She was a leader in efforts to force the NIH to include women in all clinical trials, a practice that had been resisted for many years. She sponsored the first law directing the NIH to research the miscarriage drug diethylstilbestrol (DES), which had serious health consequences for some children exposed in utero. Rep. Slaughter has also authored legislation to improve research on women's environmental health, educate Americans about colorectal cancer, and reduce waste, fraud and abuse in the Medicare program.

Rep. Slaughter is especially committed to the health care needs of her home district. She worked tirelessly to persuade the Veterans Administration to construct a new clinic in Rochester to serve local veterans. More recently, she spoke out in vocal opposition the possible closure of the veterans hospital in Canandaigua. Her office acts as a liaison between local health care providers and federal health care agencies. Further, she regularly supports applications from area hospitals and researchers for federal grant funds. In 1999 alone, over \$70 million in federal grants came into the 28th Congressional District. In 2003, she obtained \$1 million for Niagara Falls Memorial Medical Center's landmark new cardiac emergency unit.

Improving the Nation's Health

Rep. Slaughter has authored legislation prohibiting insurance companies from discriminating based on genetic information. H.R. 1910, the Genetic Nondiscrimination in Health Insurance and Employment Act, would prevent insurers from canceling, denying, refusing to renew, or changing the terms or premiums of coverage based on genetic information. It would prohibit employers from making hiring, firing, promotion, and other employment-related decision based on genetic factors. This legislation has garnered over 230 bipartisan cosponsors and endorsements from dozens of health-related organizations. In October 2003, a similar bill based on her legislation was passed unanimously by the Senate.

Because colorectal cancer receives too little attention, Rep. Slaughter has addressed the need for prevention, education, and awareness. She sponsored legislation requiring insurance companies to cover screening tests for colorectal cancer. Previous to this bill, she authored a resolution urging the Secretary of Health and Human Services to launch a new public awareness campaign on colorectal cancer. This language was included in the 1998 omnibus appropriations package and the campaign was launched in March 1999. In 1997, she requested a Department of Health and Human Services report on colorectal cancer in order to lead public education and awareness efforts.

Rep. Slaughter was a strong supporter of doubling the NIH budget over five years, a goal that was accomplished in 2003. As the nation's premier medical research institution, the NIH is responsible both for performing research and funding other investigators. Today, scientists are on the verge of breakthroughs in genetics, cell biology, and other areas that will allow for innovative new methods of detection and treatment, as well as hopefully cures and prevention. Doubling the NIH budget will ensure that no critical opportunity is wasted for lack of funding. Rep. Slaughter cosponsored annual resolutions and signed yearly letters to the funding committee in support of doubling the NIH budget.

Rep. Slaughter has been active on a wide range of other health issues, including antimicrobial resistance, female genital mutilation, environmental health, and men's health.

Improving Children's Health

Rep. Slaughter is fighting for an end to childhood lead poisoning in Western New York and across the country. As an illustration of the problem, an average of 1,200 children in Monroe County are exposed to lead poisoning each year, and 37 percent of the children tested have more lead in their blood than the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention currently considers safe. When lead paint is not eliminated from the home, children's ability to learn is impaired. Although lead-based paint was banned from use in homes in 1978, many older houses and apartments still contain lead-based paint. Research shows that children with elevated blood lead levels are seven times more likely to drop out of school and twice as likely to lose years in language acquisition. Rep. Slaughter secured \$600,000 for a national study to pinpoint the lead exposure levels that damage children's health. Rep. Slaughter was also successful in securing \$50 million increase in funding for the Office of Lead Hazard Control at the Department of Housing and Urban Development. Within the past year, this program directly awarded over \$5 million to the City of Rochester and Monroe County and over \$3 million to Erie County to eliminate lead paint in hundreds of housing units.

In the early 1990s, Rep. Slaughter wrote legislation to ensure the universal vaccination of children, leading to increased federal assistance for immunization, so that all children will be protected from serious preventable illness. The Administration based its child vaccine proposal on her bill, and the overall immunization rate for pre-school children jumped to a record 80 percent for 1998.

Rep. Slaughter spoke out in support repeatedly and voted for the federal child health insurance program, which is now enabling thousands of low income children to access health care services like vaccinations and regular check-ups. She also supported strongly passage of a federal law requiring health insurers to cover at least a 48-hour hospital stay after childbirth when a woman and her doctor consider it necessary, ending so-called "drive-through deliveries."

Rep. Slaughter has also been an outspoken advocate for programs like Healthy Start, Women, Infants and Children (WIC), and prenatal care for poor women, which help ensure that all infants receive proper medical care, nutrition, and a healthy start in life.

Improving Older Americans' Health

Rep. Slaughter has long supported efforts to provide all seniors with a prescription drug benefit through the Medicare program, cosponsoring numerous bills over the past several years. On November 21, the majority leadership presented to the House of Representatives a proposed Medicare reform package. After a great deal of thoughtful review and discussion with her constituents, Rep. Slaughter voted against this proposal because, in her judgment, it would not serve her constituents well. (For more information on this issue, see Rep. Slaughter's record on Seniors Health.)

Rep. Slaughter has a history of activism on the issue of seniors and prescription drug costs. In order to focus public attention on this problem, Rep. Slaughter saw off a group of her constituents as they traveled to Montreal, Canada to purchase their prescriptions at dramatically lower prices in 2000. In the following years, she released three separate reports showing that local seniors and individuals without health insurance pay significantly higher prices for prescription medication than pharmaceutical companies' most favored customers.

Rep. Slaughter supported and voted for new Medicare preventive care benefits, including coverage for mammograms, screening for prostate, colorectal, and cervical cancer, and bone mass measurements for osteoporosis. At the same time, she opposed major Medicare cuts that would have forced the government either to raise premiums, deductibles, and copayments to the elderly or reduce benefits, or both. Rep. Slaughter has authored legislation to cut Medicare waste, fraud and abuse by requiring all medical equipment to bear a scannable Universal Product Number for inventory and billing purposes, as well as a bill to provide assistance and information to senior citizens who wish to purchase supplemental Medicare insurance policies (Medigap).

Investigating Toxic Dyes

Representative Slaughter is deeply concerned about the link between allergies, asthma, and other ailments and artificial food colorings, including Yellow Dyes 5 and 6 (also known as Tartrazine and Sunset Yellow).

While it has been known for years that artificial dyes can cause problems for adults, recent research has found that it might also be linked to problems in children. A study funded by the British government found that children who consume foods with artificial colors in them might be more prone to hyperactivity and attention-deficit disorder.

These dyes are made from petroleum and also contain benzidine, a known cancer-causing agent. They are found in beverages, desserts, processed vegetables, drugs, and cosmetics. While the FDA does allow trace amounts of carcinogens to be present in products, a 1999 study found that levels in Yellow Dyes 5 and 6 are present in many products at much higher levels than the FDA allows.